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The

# Missouri Synod

in North America,

historically and critically examined.

A lecture

given by

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† Pastor in Gusow.



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## Foreword. ^

This small work, which I have the honor to present to the public at the request of a few friends and with the permission of his widow, is primarily intended for the numerous friends of the deceased. He himself, who was called away from his happy family life and a richly blessed activity beyond all expectations, was unfortunately unable to put the finishing touches on it, and piety prevented us from changing even the slightest thing. A lenient assessment of all those further down the line can therefore be expected. And this is all the more so since an exhaustive scientific treatment of the subject was not intended.

Rudolf Hoffmann (born April 19, 1849, died December 21, 1880) had followed the movement of the Lutheran Church in America with interest early on, inspired by many connections. His great office in Gusow an der Ostbahn, to which he was appointed on March 20, 1878 by His Excellency Count Clemens von Schönburg-Glauchau as successor to Pastor Baltzer, prevented him from a more in-depth study of the matter. He received the impetus to write about the Missouri Synod in its

present form at a district synod, where he was asked to give a lecture on this subject on the occasion of a discussion about the events at the August 1879 conference. Despite his heavy workload and faltering health, he set to work on it in the winter of 1879/80, and it was refreshing to see his enjoyment of this stimulating activity and to talk to him about it. In his modesty, he was initially reluctant to publish the lecture. But his friends urged him. Now it is a duty of gratitude to them for the love and loyalty they shared with him to commemorate him in this work of his, in which others will also find traces of his rich gifts. —

Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord; their works do follow them. [Rev. 14:13] —

Berlin, April 1881.

**Dr. Karl Kinzel.**

^ On the second day of last year's August conference, it caused no small commotion when, on the occasion of the papers presented, some younger clergymen, otherwise known as belonging to the confessional party, expressed their sharp opposition to the more recent development of German Lutheran theology and Lutheranism in the fatherland in general, an opposition which, from the mouth of one, found its definite coloring and its positive complement in the surprising recommendation of the American Missouri Synod as the only pure and therefore so richly blessed Lutheran Church fellowship on earth. People were astonished, even more indignant, and rejected the idea of shaping the domestic situation along Missourian lines. The excitement also spread outside the conference, and for a while the Missourians became the talk of the day among the ministers, with some realizing that they still knew very little about them. But where should the compulsion come from to concern oneself with the wonders of a church formation so far away from us? Or would the hobby of a few clergymen also be worthy of greater attention? However, the incident seems to take on a more serious significance when one reads what Luthardt's [\*Kirchenzeitung\* wrote about it in No. 39 of the past year \[1879\] \(pag. 926\)](#): "As everywhere at Lutheran assemblies, there were also here, without anyone suspecting it, some followers of the Missourians present who considered the moment suitable to prepare the ground for the direction they were cultivating." So could there even be dangers that confront us here, and that we have to fend off in time? Or is that friend of the Americans right after all? If it were as he said,

would the ideal of a Lutheran church fellowship be found in the Missouri Synod, the realization of which we must strive for? Would we have to sit learning at the feet of Missouri? The following presentation would like to make a small contribution to answering these questions. In the first part we want to describe the origin and development of Missouri up to the present, and then, in the second part, examine in more detail the factors at work in the areas of doctrine and constitution, whereby light and shadow, advantages and shortcomings will then be differentiated before our eyes.

△ It was\*) in November 1838 when five ships with German, specifically Saxon, emigrants set sail from Bremerhafen for their new home in the West, the much-praised land of freedom and happiness. They sought happiness less than freedom and political freedom less than ecclesiastical freedom, which they thought they no longer had in their old homeland. At the head of this movement was the pastor Martin Stephan from Dresden, a man of eminent gifts and wonderful power over the hearts of men. He had been preaching the gospel faithfully and loudly in Saxony's capital since 1810, while the most shallow rationalism prevailed all around, and had awakened many. The rarer a believing preacher was at that time, the more love he reaped from those who were fed up with the disgusting fare of a leveling enlightenment, and Stephan won unconditional trust especially by repeatedly pointing his followers to the symbolic books and the writings of the old Lutheran fathers as the ever-fresh sources of divine truth. A large circle of awakened souls soon gathered around his person, preachers also joined him and carried

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\*) The following historical information is largely taken from the synodical reports published by the synod and from the book by Köstering (*Emigration of the Saxon Lutherans in 1838*. St. Louis 1867).

the new fire of faith into their congregations, and those who were inflamed by it saw in Stephan their chief pastor. But the poor man could not tolerate such a high position; rumors soon spread among his opponents, who were highly suspicious of his conduct, and his friends also saw much that did not fit the official skirt of a Protestant pastor; but since he always knew how to justify himself, since he also emerged free from all investigations, the trust only grew. For a long time he had been reinforcing the opinion in his believers that they could not live their faith in the rotten church of the fatherland, and had pointed to America as the only country where it was still possible to build a true church. When he was imprisoned for some time at the end of 1837, he declared that the hour had now come when God wanted them to shake the dust off their feet and designated the Missouri region as the destination for their emigration. On September 4, 1838, 707 people, including five preachers, had already registered, who put their assets totaling 123,987 thalers into a credit fund, from which all needs were to be met in a communist manner, and which was confidently placed in Stephan's hands. In November they set off on five ships, one of which sank, and on February 19, 1839 the rest arrived in St. Louis, but by no means in a cheerful mood. If Stephan had already betrayed hierarchical desires at home and taught that the preaching office was a means of grace, the pastor the actual church ruler, whom the congregation had to obey unconditionally in everything that was not contrary to God's Word, this had degenerated on the way into a tyrannical rule over his entourage, while he had secretly conspired with his closest friends that they

should proclaim him bishop in the new settlement. 110 miles south of St. Louis, in Perry County, a place was selected on the Mississippi for settlement, and 4440 acres were purchased for 10,000 dollars, to which all but 120 people, who remained in St. Louis, departed. But now came the time of disappointment; the area was wild and poor, so that for the time being there was hardly any hope of a profit, diseases broke out and carried off many, Stephan made the most absurd orders and tolerated no contradiction, the credit fund was running low, everything seemed to be rushing towards an inevitable misery. But then God saw His hour to expose the great hypocrite. In St. Louis two girls confessed how Stephan had abused them, and the young pastor Carl Ferdinand Wilhelm Walther traveled to Perry County with the evidence in his hand. Now everything came to light, including how badly Stephan had squandered the money entrusted to him — he had spent 4000 thalers on himself in a short time — he was removed from office, put on a barge across the Mississippi and died in his sins a few years later. These were the first blows of God's rod of discipline, others followed, the money was spent, the result was abject poverty, several returned to Germany, the others fell into more spiritual than external distress. They felt that they had done wrong to put their trust in one man, that they had done wrong to leave their home church, that they were no longer a Christian congregation at all, but a bunch of people who had run together, that they were lost in time and eternity. <sup>^</sup> It was one man who saved them, the aforementioned Walther, now the head of the Missouri Synod. With his brother-in-law [E. G. W. Keyl], also an expatriate preacher who owned an excellent library,



he had immersed himself in the writings of the fathers and with his clear mind soon recognized Stephan's errors. In a public disputation, Walther victoriously argued 1) that the congregation [*Gemeinde*], although afflicted with many sins, was nevertheless a Christian one, 2) that despite all its aberrations, Christ was nevertheless among it with his means of grace; 3) that the congregation [*Gemeinde*] had the full right to call preachers. The 7th article of the Augsburg Confession served him as a basis: the true church is an invisible one, the totality of all believers, this and not a single state had received all rights and promises from the Lord. — Walther's [*Altenburg*] *Theses* were a resounding success, the ban was broken, the inner distress was lifted, and little by little the outer distress also lifted; a gradual flourishing of the congregation began, which founded six towns in Perry County: Wittenberg, Seelitz, Dresden, Altenburg, Frohne and Johannesberg, to which the community of Paitzdorf was later added through a Thuringian emigration. Those who stayed behind in St. Louis, mostly very poor people, gradually found themselves in a more bearable situation and were able to build their own little church, the Trinity Church, in 1842, where Walther still serves as pastor today. As the need to train capable teachers was soon recognized, Pastor Löber founded a seminary in Altenburg, where he taught children in elementary subjects and prepared young people for the ministry, assisted by three candidates. The seminary was handed over to the Missouri Synod in 1849, which soon afterwards moved it to St. Louis, erected a stately building for it and appointed Walther as its first professor. | ^ But how did the Missouri Synod come about? As early as 1844, Walther founded a popular church paper, *Der Lutheraner*, with the purpose of

"acquainting the congregation with the doctrine, treasures and history of the Lutheran Church and to warn against all false teaching". This paper, much maligned at first, quickly gained a considerable readership, even beyond the Saxon congregations. Now in America, where the separation of church and state is *de facto* complete, where no protection is granted to church communities from any side, where an appalling mammonism and a desolate worldly life threatens to flood and bury all emerging church life, the congregations are necessarily urged to unite. Thus the call went out from many German towns in Illinois and Ohio to Missouri, which had gained renown through *Der Lutheraner*: Come to the gathering! In 1847, a number of 12 pastors and 10 congregations came together to form a synod, which held its first meetings in Chicago from April 24 to May 6. They united to form a constitution, which set out the following requirements as a condition for joining the synod: 1) the confession of the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as the written Word of God and the only rule and guideline of faith and life; 2) acceptance of all the symbolic books of the Evangelical Lutheran Church; 3) renunciation of all church and religious syncretism [*Glaubensmengerei*]; 4) exclusive use of pure church and school books; 5) exclusive use of the German language in synod meetings. —   <sup>^</sup> The whole constitution of the Synod is a democratic one; each local congregation elects its minister at its own discretion and also supervises him to see whether he preaches according to the Word of God and the doctrine of the Church; important questions are decided in the congregational assemblies, whereby unanimity is to be achieved. (For example, the synod reprimanded a

pastor for banning a member of the congregation, even though only one member of the congregation objected). — The synod, in which pastors and congregational deputies participate, is only a consultative body. Section 9 of the constitution states: "No decision of the synod, if it imposes something on the congregation as a synod decision, has binding force for the latter. Such a synod decision can only be binding if the individual congregation has voluntarily accepted and confirmed it by congregational resolution. If a congregation does not find the decision in accordance with the Word of God or unsuitable for its circumstances, it has the right to disregard or reject the decision." However, this freedom is again very limited, because if a congregation does not agree with the decisions taken, it is excluded from the synod association, at least every time it concerns a point of doctrine. The most important subjects of discussion at the synods are doctrinal questions. It must be recognized that much and faithful work is done and almost no synodal assembly leaves without a decision on a point of doctrine, whereby the symbolic books down to the letter and the writings of the Lutheran dogmatists of the 16th and 17th centuries form the standard; but once the decision has been made, the resolutions are regarded as pure doctrine of the Word of God, to which everyone must submit. Pure doctrine is the schibboleth of the synod, against which everything else, such as worship, discipline, etc., takes a back seat. Every synod address deals almost exclusively with pure doctrine, while the conditions and life in the congregations are almost completely absent.

^ Before we go into this in more detail, however, we may briefly outline the external development of the Synod up to the present day. Professor Walther was the first president

of the synod and remained so until 1853, when Pastor Wyneken took his place. After the latter resigned his office in 1864, Walther took over the presidency again and continued it until 1878, when he gave it up definitively due to overburdening. — The synod circle grew steadily; in 1848 it already comprised twenty-five pastors with their congregations, in 1849 already fifty-nine, and soon the number had grown so much, the spatial expansion so significant, that in 1853, albeit reluctantly, the Synod was divided into four districts, which met annually for special assemblies, while the general synod from then on only met every three years. Anyone who takes an impartial look at the progress the Synod has made since its inception cannot fail to admire it. From the very beginning, the aim was to seek out the scattered German Lutherans and unite them into congregations. The office of a so-called visitor was established, whose duty was to make annual journeys to the remotest regions in order to bring God's Word to the German brethren; a heathen mission was founded as early as 1848, which had a beneficial effect among the Chippeway Indians for a time. In the following year, a publishing company was formed which, under Walther's special direction, aimed to publish all the books required for the Synod. — ↑ The synod's institutions also multiplied. We have already mentioned the first preacher's seminary in Altenburg and how it was moved to St. Louis in 1849. A second seminary was added in Fort Wayne. The latter is a creation of blessed Löhe, who sent eleven young men to America in 1846 for further training for the ministry. By a formal deed of donation in 1847, he gave the institution

to the Missouri Synod, which also transferred it to St. Louis in 1860, whereby the following difference was noted: the earlier Altenburg seminary was to pursue a theoretical course of education and approach the level of a German faculty, while the Löhe seminary focused on a more rapid, practical training for the sacred ministry. Soon after the seminary was established in Fort Wayne, a grammar school was set up, which was fully equipped for higher studies and was not only attended by future theologians. — In the early years, the pastors were also the school teachers of their congregations; as the two soon proved to be incompatible with the growing number of congregation members, consideration was given to hiring school teachers and a school teachers' seminary was established, which flourished in Addison near Chicago under the direction of the late Pastor Lindemann. He also made a notable contribution by publishing the *[Evangelical Lutheran School Journal](#)*. <sup>1</sup> Thus the church fellowship developed both internally and externally, and if one wants to pay due tribute to the progress it has made, one only has to compare the current state of the synod with its early beginnings. In 1847 there were twelve preachers who united to form the Synod, today the last report from 1878, which we essentially follow here, counts 581 preachers with almost as many congregations and a population of more than 10,600, extending through the entire eastern half of the United States and beyond to Canada. The original four districts have now become eight, which strengthen and edify each other in annual meetings; the general president — now Pastor Schwan — is no longer able to visit the individual congregations, as was originally intended; he is content

to attend the district conferences. — The little church in St. Louis has disappeared; in its place, the bells of a beautiful Gothic church, built in 1865 at a cost of more than a hundred thousand dollars [~ \$2MM in 2024], ring out on Sundays. The city's one congregation has expanded into four congregations with as many churches: Trinity, Immanuel, Zion and the Holy Cross Church. The institutions of the synod are in a flourishing condition, the Concordia College at St. Louis has five teachers [Walther, Lange, Schaller, Günther, Pieper] and ninety-six students; the practical seminary, removed to Springfield, Illinois, in 1874, has seventy seminarians; the school teachers' seminary at Addison has one hundred and twelve young people, and the high school at Fort Wayne is attended by 225 pupils. In addition, a commercial school and a high school for girls in St. Louis, an institution for the deaf and dumb in Royal Oak, Michigan, a hospital and an orphanage near St. Louis, the Martin Luther orphanage in West Roxbury near Boston and the orphanage near Addison are maintained by the Synod or by individual smaller districts. [L](#) [^](#) In addition to the hymnals, school books and prayer books in use in the Synod and the numerous writings of Walther, including above all an excellent Gospel Postil and a detailed pastoral theology, the book publisher has also reprinted some valuable old works, such as the great Altenburg Bible and Johann Gerhard's edifying writings; it has also published a popular edition of Luther's works. We will refrain from further remarks; let everyone judge for himself the importance of this publishing house and its utilization by the congregation, when we note that the pure surplus in the three years from 1875-78 amounted to the sum of \$83,893, which flowed into the synod treasury.

The synod publishes four periodicals, *Der Lutheraner* with about 10,000 subscribers, a theological-scientific journal, *Lehre und Wehre*, with a thousand readers, as well as a pastoral journal: *Magazin für evangelisch-luth. Homiletik* and the *Evang.-luth. Schulblatt*, and in addition there is an annual German calendar. — The synod is also very active externally. <sup>1</sup> Although the heathen mission had to be given up in the 1860s, presumably because the Indian tribes among whom it worked left their homes, the contributions are still paid and are now given to the Hermannsburg and Leipzig missions; in recent years these together received around 6000 dollars. Newly added is a Negro mission, which has its headquarters in New Orleans, and an emigrant mission, which takes care of the immigrating Germans in New York and Baltimore, both physically and spiritually, and even has an agent in Hamburg. — But all this is the work of barely forty years; the small mustard seed has grown into a tree whose shade is sought by many; the seed that was once sown with trembling and trepidation has yielded a thousandfold harvest; no authority has protected the construction with its arm, no state has offered the means, no compulsion has extorted the money; the mites have been voluntarily placed in the treasury by rich and poor, free love has added one thing to another; — who could fail to recognize the blessing of God? Whose eye would have been clouded by the prejudice that he would not gladly and joyfully admit: The Lord has done this? — <sup>1</sup> Yes, no matter how significant the exhibitions are that we will still have to make in the following Synod, we will nevertheless not be able to deny ourselves the insight that in it a homely asylum has been built for our German brethren over there, in which they can save their souls from the

spiritual dangers that occur there with even greater power than in the fatherland. The Missouri Synod has also well recognized these dangers; they threaten not only individuals, but also itself, indeed all the church fellowships of North America. It has therefore always sought to unite the individual German-Lutheran synods that exist side by side. A little more may be said about this.

The first negotiations were already initiated in the 1840s with the Buffalo Synod, which was founded in 1839 by Pastor Grabau, who had emigrated from Erfurt because of his opposition to the Prussian Union. They broke up after degenerating into a major dispute over church and ministry. <sup>↓</sup><sup>↑</sup> Unfortunately, it is a most unpleasant picture that this dispute reveals to us and we regret that this is the first time that the friendly impressions we have received so far have been tarnished. The greater right lay on the side of Missouri, for Grabau, a domineering man, had the same exaggerated, absolutist conception of authority as Stephan in his day; he and his few followers regarded themselves as the ecclesiastical government and promptly excommunicated anyone who would not submit to him. The Missourians were right when they objected, but it would be difficult for anyone to agree with their democratic conception of church and ministry, according to which they assigned church government to the **individual** congregation [*Einzelgemeinde*], and they acted hastily by taking in the excommunicated, without prior agreement [*Verständigung*] with the Buffalonians, and providing them with preachers, even accepting the complaint of a congregation about a Buffalo pastor, albeit always an unfair one [*Buffalo pastor*], and sitting in judgment on him. The controversy lasted until the year 1853; [when] the Buffalonians demanded the withdrawal of the Missourian preachers, the fanatical preachers [*Rottenprediger*], as they liked to express themselves,



the Missourians objected; each synod boasted of pure doctrine and denounced and condemned the other. The closing words of the Buffalo Synod of June 21, 1853, with which the negotiations came to an end, serve as a sample of the usual tone. It reads:

“Thus nothing remains for us but to denounce to the whole Lutheran Church this abomination which the Synod of Missouri has perpetrated and is still perpetrating and intends to perpetuate, according to Matt. 18: Say to the churches: May the merciful God look on, save the poor, and finally put a bridle and a bit in the mouth of all the arrogant, irreconcilable ravagers of the vineyard of Christ.”

Even if the Missouri Synod used far more moderate language in its official documents, it did not give way in its private writings. Köstering, the historian of the Synod, says, for example, *op. cit.* page 105:

“Is it not downright blasphemous that Grabau equates the stinking papal anointing with the anointing of the true believers with the Holy Spirit? The Lord rebuke you, you blasphemer!”

When, in later years, Grabau was deposed by his own synod due to excessive abuses, negotiations were resumed, which led to an agreement with some, but another part, the so-called [von Rohr](#) faction, remained in opposition, and no agreement has yet been reached. <sup>1</sup> Another doctrinal meeting took place in 1875 with the Iowa Synod, which was founded by Löhe after his break-up with the Missourians, as will be discussed below. Here, too, the questions about the validity of the symbolic books, the Antichrist and chiliasm remained unresolved, and they parted without result, but the Iowa Synod suffered the disadvantage that part of its community [*Gemeinde*] broke away from it and fell to the Missourians. The negotiations with other German-Lutheran

synods were more successful, however, and a respectable union has now developed between the Missouri, Illinois, Minnesota, Ohio, Wisconsin and Norwegian synods, which meet annually in July for large synod conferences; they represent an ecclesiastical body of about a thousand pastors and congregations and, united in doctrine, successfully resist the advances of Methodism and Romanism on the one hand and atheism and materialism on the other, and are also politically not unimportant for Germany, since they strengthen the German element on foreign soil with great love and cultivate the German language and German character.

△ Let us now return to the Missouri Synod in particular. Having sketched its outward history in general outline, it is unnecessary for us now to go deeper and look at the hearth on which the fire of its power glows. How did the Synod become what it is, and what are its driving forces? What is the underlying principle? What trend is being pursued? Both are one here; the ground on which it stands is also the goal it continues to strive for. Three essential elements come into consideration: **unity of doctrine, purity of doctrine, freedom of the Church**; great and beautiful ideals indeed! Is their realization not the longing of the most faithful members of our domestic church? **We** have neither the one nor the other, but confusion within and destructive influences from outside. To no small extent, our modern theology has detached itself from the firm foundation of the church's confession and is drifting rudderless on the open sea of human opinions and philosophical speculations. Yes and no, faith and unbelief both claim their place in the Church, and even if the latter has not yet been recognized, it has

almost achieved *de facto* equality with revealed truth. Certainly, as long as there are pulpits in which the divinity of Christ is proclaimed in the morning and denied in the afternoon, as long as we have to tolerate members as representatives of the church community [*Kirchengemeinde*] who openly confess their apostasy from church doctrine, as long as opportunism and consideration for powers outside the church have the decision in their most important questions of life, as long as we can boast of neither unity nor purity nor freedom, and if the Missouri Synod has really worked its way up to a fellowship in which the idea of the church has taken on a better form, it is understandable that it has an attractive and enticing effect on those who are tired of the misery in their own house. <sup>^</sup> But test everything and only keep what is good! — we do not want to forget this here either. Let us first examine the **doctrinal unity** of the Synod. The Missourians are Lutherans in the fullest sense of the word. Their hearts are attached to the Lutheran Church, in which they correctly recognize, not the alone saving church, but "the renewed apostolic church and the divinely appointed bearer of pure Christian doctrine". They therefore defended themselves against all influences from the Reformed side and against all unionism. And so they may! This is precisely where the strength of the Synod lies — but how can the excessive language with which they dismiss their opponents be justified? It happens that they speak of the Reformed as the infidels of Zwingli, and in his jubilant sermon, preached on April 26, 1872, the anniversary of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Synod, Walther speaks of "the spirit of a religious union which now blows through all Christendom like a pestilential air and

suffocates and kills all love for pure truth at birth" ([page 10](#)). But we will find even more to disapprove of than mere expressions. Let us look further. <sup>^</sup> The doctrinal unity is built on the Lutheran Confession. Differences that arise are, if they cannot be settled beforehand, postponed until the next synod meeting and settled there by resolution. Although detailed discussions are held in an attempt to convince the erring party, if it ultimately does not agree unreservedly, fellowship with it is dissolved. Here we see the revival of an old Lutheran practice, as it was practiced when the Formula of Concord was written. But how different the situation was back then! The church had been torn apart by years of bitterly fought disputes, which ultimately threatened the existence of the Lutheran church in Germany. Something had to be done and the most prudent attempts at unification were made, which were then crowned with success. But where does Missouri get the right to imitate this procedure for every single, often quite minor doctrinal question and to stop the often only just emerging stream of a doctrinal development by a synod decision that claims the status of a symbol? It is certainly necessary to build dams against a false freedom of science; we have had enough experience here of what too great a connivance leads to, but on the other hand: if the dams are drawn too narrowly, the greater will be the danger that the dammed waters will one day break through them and not only devastate the land that one wants to protect, but also make the dams themselves contemptible. If it has not yet come to that, the Synod owes it to the preserving grace of God, but an example may illustrate its procedure. <sup>^</sup> Since [[Johann Albrecht](#)] [Bengel](#), [chiliasm](#) has again been brought to the forefront of evangelical theology, and the gloomy

present urges believing Christians to concern themselves more seriously than ever with the future of the kingdom of God. We are not speaking here of any chiliastic enthusiasm or playfulness, but it is undeniable that the prophecy of Scripture is more thoroughly appreciated today than at the time of the Reformation, and it would be easy to name quite a number of the most respected and faithful Lutherans who themselves, without knowing themselves to be in contradiction with their Lutheran confession, incline to a mild chiliasm. If, however, the 17th article of the Augsburg Confession is invoked (*damnant et alios, qui nunc spargunt judaicas opiniones, quod ante resurrectionem mortuorum pii regnum mundi occupaturi sint, ubique oppressis impiis*), it must not be forgotten that it has only a negative meaning and is directed against the rapturous follies of the Anabaptists, but still leaves room for a positive interpretation. In fact, if in Germany all adherents of even a prudent chiliasm were to be expelled from the church as having fallen away from the Lutheran Confession, then perhaps the remaining part would be smaller than the expelled part. Enough, we at least tolerate a prudent chiliasm and see no heresy in it, but await the time until this doctrine, which is still in full flux, will one day have found its conclusion by God's grace. The Missourians are different. Pastor Schieferdecker in Altenburg, Perry County, successor to the above-mentioned Löber, had fallen for Chiliasm in the 1850s through the writings of Bavarian theologians [*Löhe, etc.*] in particular. He also mentioned it in a sermon, but was immediately asked by some leaders to recant. Schieferdecker was reluctant, some of the congregation declared themselves for him, others against him. Unfortunately, he allowed himself to be carried away by some recklessness, which made his cause

a rather lost one right from the start. The synod was also involved. At its meetings in 1875, it dealt with this question. Pastor Schieferdecker was sought to be instructed, he declared that he wanted to stay away from any fanaticism, "to profess all the fundamental articles of the Christian faith of the return of Christ to the last judgment and of the general resurrection of the dead connected with it, also to the fact that the Church would have its cross and tribulation until the Last Day, and that this Last Day could come at any moment, but that he still hoped, on the basis of biblical prophecy, for a final victory of Christ's kingdom on earth and the destruction of the Antichrists, but wanted this to be regarded as his private opinion and not to be imposed on anyone." Nevertheless, the Synod was not satisfied and finally passed the resolution: "Since all attempts to lead the aforementioned back from his error proved to be in vain, the synod recognizes from this that Pastor Schieferdecker no longer stands with it on a foundation of faith and sees itself compelled to decline further synod fellowship to him." It is also genuinely Missourian to mark the soul-destroying danger of the opposing doctrine by using strong expressions such as plague, poisonous plant, Satanic deception. ^ But if we disregard this — this example should only serve as an illustration — another question arises: Are there any unanswered questions [or "Open Questions"] for the Missourians at all, on which it is left to the Christian to decide one way or the other? No, not any more. They emphasized this to the Iowa Synod in the strongest terms. So everything has already been decided and the only demand is: submit! But, lest we say too much, at the conference of delegates of the synods united with Missouri in 1877, points were made on

which one could disagree; it is interesting to hear some of them. One could therefore argue 1) about whether the thousand years of Revelation begin with Constantine or Luther — but whoever postponed them to the future was violating the foundation of faith; 2) whether the world will pass away completely on the Last Day, or whether it will only be transformed into a new, more beautiful earth, i.e. transfigured, — but whoever believes the latter should be very seriously spoken to; 3) what the penny in the parable of the laborers in the vineyard means, — but whoever believes that it is eternal life, is violating the foundation of faith. And other things of this kind. It must be admitted that the material released is not very rich and promising. That would be a picture of the doctrinal unity of the Synod and some might think: God save us from that! However, it must be recognized that the Missourians owe no small part of their power to the unshakeable consistency with which they rest on the symbolic books and suppress everything that looks like a foreign fire on the altar, for the simple Christian in particular does not want any staggering or wavering in matters of faith, but a firm foundation and secure hold, and we could at least learn so much determination from Missouri that we would finally close the doors of the churches to those who have also broken with the foundations of faith, and that we would stop building bridges even further away, where every bridge is a denial of Christ — we would not become weaker but stronger. That would still be far from Missourian over-tension, which is less about unity than about unification of doctrine and in which a strong Romanist streak is expressed. It almost sounds like the statutes of a Jesuit college when one reads their demand that one teacher at the college

should supervise the other and one synod the other. By the way, there is a double danger in this procedure, (1) the one that sluggish minds rest very easily and comfortably on the ready-made decisions, those who are more deeply excited feel the restraints as a pressure and are not satisfied; (2) the other, that any differences that nevertheless arise, which will not fail to arise in the future, could be of much more devastating effect and easily jeopardize the entire existence of the synod. But the Missourians are little deterred by this and oppose it: “**Our doctrinal unity rests on our doctrinal purity**”. So we should respond to this. Here, however, we must first consider Walther's personality; he is the creator and to this day the spiritual leader of the Synod; those who know him know it; he has understood how to instill his thoughts, his direction and his goals into it. Walther is a faithful son of the German Reformation; having emerged from the Saxon Lutheran Church, he recognizes in Lutheranism the genuine continuation and resurrection of pure apostolic original Christianity. Called from the beginning to lead his fellow believers in America, he maintained his prominent position with honor and acquired an astonishing wealth of thorough scholarship with iron diligence. He has a complete command of his Augustine and Luther and has a more thorough knowledge of the early Lutheran dogmatists than probably any other theologian of our time. Equipped with the gifts of a sharp dialectic, a skillful presentation and a significant eloquence borne by the warmth of conviction, it was easy for him to make the spirits his subjects. Missourian theology is thus actually Walther's theology, but the Synod has professed it in all respects. If we want to describe it in one word, we must say that it is a



pure repristination of Old Lutheran dogmatics. We find all the evidence for the listed doctrines [**chilialism, usury, etc.**] taken only from the writings of the Fathers; only in these writings do they see the faithful expression of the ecclesiastical symbols, only in them the pure flowing fountain of biblical truth. It is certainly highly commendable that they have uncovered the hidden treasures of doctrine and awakened love for it, in contrast to the disregard with which the old dogmatics are often treated as a dead, ossified orthodoxy in the theological cathedrals, thereby discouraging young minds from engaging with it from the outset; It is commendable that they show us how we can still get the best out of these yellowed pages, the venerable witnesses of a time stronger and purer in faith than ours. On the other hand, everyone knows today that the dogmatism of Gerhard, Quenstedt and Calow also has its weaknesses — it is, after all, only human piecemeal work — weaknesses that we have already overcome in part; why now — the question may be permitted — why should we accept this without looking at it? That is the most regrettable thing about the Synod, that it recognizes nothing beyond the seventeenth century. With Pietism begins the time of the "most terrible decay of the Church".

△ In the early years, she maintained lively relations with the most respected Lutherans in Germany, with [Löhe](#), [Delitzsch](#), [Rudelbach](#) and [Harleß](#). But this did not last long. She came into conflict with Löhe over the question of Church and Ministry. Walther and Wyneken were sent to Germany to reach an understanding, which was achieved for the time being. But as the Missourian ways became more and more separated from the German, Löhe withdrew and founded the Iowa Synod in 1854, and the

other theologians also gradually severed their ties. In Missouri's eyes, of course, they are now all false teachers, just like the Union theologians. At this moment Walther is publishing an expanded edition of the good old *Baier Compendium theologiae positivae*, with annotations. As praiseworthy as the work is otherwise, so many quotations from the works of newer German theologians, especially Hoffmann's and Kahnis' (even Philippi is not spared) are listed under the special heading: Antitheses, that one almost gets the impression that the work has a general tendency to denounce the new Lutheranism. <sup>^</sup> Of course, it is easy to criticize heretical beliefs, and theology in Germany is certainly not lacking in its dark side — but simply scaling back two centuries is not enough. Are we not in the process of regaining in a renewed form what our fathers once held in quiet possession? The storms have roared destructively through the doctrinal edifice of our church, negative criticism has sought to undermine the foundation of the authenticity of the biblical books, a shallow rationalism in alliance with a faithless philosophy has dared to attack the pillars of church dogma, a materialistic natural science is still tearing away at the masonry of basic Christian truths — the devastation of more than a hundred years of destruction is certainly not small, and there is still plenty in ruins, but at least we are already rebuilding, and if we cannot finish everything immediately, do we deserve ridicule for that? If we have learned from our opponents here and there, is that a pity? If we build differently in some places than our fathers, join the beams differently, add other decorations, should we not be allowed to do so? Should there have been no more development in theology

for two hundred years or even since the year of the Formula of Concord? Would the Holy Spirit have ceased to guide us into all truth? Or would the truth only lie behind us and not also before us? I cannot refrain from quoting a pertinent word by Loehe from the preface to the second volume of his *Der evangelische Geistliche* (p. XII f.). He says:

“To the so-called Lutheran, i.e. the true catholic Christian, belongs the entire past before and after Luther; the future must also belong to him. Everything is his, what is true and scriptural, when, where and how it is said, and the *norma normata* of the sixteenth century is not congruent to him in the pinnacle of the *norma normans*, that it is exhausted in that and that God himself would no longer have permitted to give his church anything else that was either not had or not observed in the normal year 1580.”

△ Missourian theology is merely backward theology and as such is already insufficient; but there are many other things. The Missourians did almost nothing in the way of independent biblical research; it is extremely rare to find an exegetical work. It sounds more than naive when a pastor Röbbelen, who published an interpretation of the Apocalypse in *the "Lutheraner*, declared that he could not consider this book canonical because Luther did not consider it canonical either, and the enlightened man understood more about it than he did. (Köstering p. 180 ff.) For the rest, the Missourians regard Holy Scripture only as a collection of *dicta probantia* for dogmatics; it is clear that the divine word is not given its due. But what is taken away from it [Scripture] is given too much to the symbolic books, and thus what should at first be a testimony of doctrine becomes an essential source of doctrine. Here lies, however much their willing submission is to be acknowledged, the fundamental error of the Missourians. The

symbolic books in honor — would to God they were better known and more diligently studied among us — they are also a norm for us, and in accepting them we need not hide behind the reserve: *quatenus verbo dei consentiunt*, [**in so far as they agree with the Word of God**] but since they are also the work of men, we must also distinguish between the essential and the non-essential in them and must not forget that they can be norm and foundation, but not already the goal and end of theological knowledge. Missouri, however, turns the confessions, whose literal, unreserved acceptance she demands, into a code of law, into a paper pope, and so, against her will, her exaggerated Lutheranism turns into Romanism, whose bitterest opponents they otherwise are. Just listen to this one thing: ^ Because in the Smalcald Articles (Concordia ed. Müller 308,10 [[Trigl. 475, 10](#); [web](#)]) the pope is called the Antichrist, therefore he must not be a part of it, as the Apology says (*papatus erit pars regni antichristi*, Concordia 209, 18 [[Trigl. 318, 18](#), [web](#)]), but **the** Antichrist; indeed, this is so much a main doctrine with them that Walther goes so far as to assert: as the Jews sinned by not recognizing Jesus as the Christ, so Christians sin if they do not recognize the Pope as the Antichrist (*Lehre und Wehre 1880, p. 26*), and further: Whoever does not consider the pope to be the Antichrist, we cannot consider him a Christian, let alone a Lutheran. (*Lehre und Wehre 1869, p. 269*) Every error carries its judgment within itself. Where will these paths lead? ^ That even the symbols will no longer suffice, and that even the best Lutheran dogmatists must ultimately become false teachers. The direction has already been taken. Johann Gerhard *et al.* are criticized for having sought to mediate between the general divine will of grace and the special individual election

in the *fides praevisa* or in the *intuitus fidei*, and for not simply agreeing to the harsh doctrine of predestination laid down by Luther in his *de servo arbitrio*; Chemnitz himself no longer exists before Missouri's eyes, because he taught that regeneration is not a repeated one (in repentance and conversion), but a unique one in baptism (cf. Chemnitz *exam. concil. trid.* p. 273); a part of other dogmatists become direct false teachers, because they do not pursue free-church Missourian ideals in the question of salvation, or because in the doctrine of Sunday they do not rest exclusively on the 28th Art. of the Augustana [[AC 28, 53](#)], but have also emphasized the other ropes, according to which a commandment of God valid for all times [**the Sabbath**] is also the core here; finally, the confession is not sufficient either, since it has become a new Missourian confession by synod decision that any taking of interest is usury and therefore sin ([Synod Report of 1869](#)), incidentally one of the weakest arguments that can be read, where only with difficulty the relevant scriptural passages and Luther are forced into the Missourian view. [|^](#) Where will the Synod end once Walther's still prudent hand no longer holds the reins and the desire to teach pure doctrine grows with the arrogance of having pure doctrine? But what result will we achieve? Will anyone else agree with the Synod's self-importance that pure doctrine has been given to it in general lease? No, thank God, Missouri also is in error, and we wish her above all to become more modest in her polemics and to submit more humbly to the apostle's instruction: "We see here through a mirror in a dark word." [[1 Cor. 13:12](#)] Or is anyone else inclined to recommend Missouri as the salvation for our ecclesiastical conditions? Truly, then we would soon be cast aside as unfit

Yes, they reply from over there, that is because you are in the enslaved state church. We alone have the necessary freedom that the Church needs. A word about that too. American ecclesiastical conditions do not compare well with those at home. The church over there [[in America](#)], detached from the state, is a purely private institution. As long as it does not come into conflict with the laws of the land, it can do as it pleases. Whoever looks at the abundance of the most diverse church denominations that have sprung up on American soil, whoever considers how often bottomless enthusiasm and the most refined greed for profit seek to seize the religious needs of the emigrants in order to mislead and finally destroy them, will have little desire for a transplanting of this foreign plant of freedom to German soil. Nevertheless, it would be understandable if the Missourians, who have been able to expand so richly in this air of freedom within a few years, as described above, were full of praise for it. [|^](#) But what entitles them to see in every union of church and state a false form of ecclesiastical nature? In Missouri they love to speak not of the German **regional** churches, but of the German **state** churches, and to regard the local clergy as willing servants of the state. Especially the United regional churches are an abomination to her as works and instruments of darkness; but she does not place the Lutheran churches much higher (cf. Walther's synodical address in the [Synod report of 1872 \[e.g. page 30\]](#)). Thus it has almost lost all understanding of our ecclesiastical situation. But if we have already twice had to refer to the Romanism to which one falls prey, here it comes to light for the third time. For the view of the state as a power merely opposed to the church

is Roman, but not Protestant. Here, too, opinions differ; some hold that it was only a makeshift and pernicious to the Church, others, like Steinmeyer (*Begr. des Kirchenreg. p. 90 f.*) and similarly Philippi (*Dogmat. V. p. 135*), recognize a divinely ordained way in the fact that Luther placed the government of the Church, which the bishops possessed not *jure divino*, but only *jure humano*, in the hands of the sovereign, who was inclined to the Gospel. <sup>^</sup> Be that as it may, no one is enthusiastic about our present state of affairs, except, for example, the middle party, which is ready for any service and endowed with an unshakeable, enviable confidence, but even the fiercest opponents of the sovereign church regime are far from praising and recommending the Free Church; and rightly so. For what we have seen of it so far in our own fatherland cannot arouse any longing for it, and its scientific defense stands on weak foundations. It is a very poor assertion that the Missourian Pastor Hübener from Dresden recently sent out into the world that the church was born as a free church; the Luthardt's *Kirchenzeitung* simply and correctly counters that because we are born as children, must we also remain children? Of course, a regional church is engaged in much greater and more difficult battles than a free church — for every direction that emerges in the state also affects the church associated with it — but to slander it because of these battles would be just as much as if, in battle, the soldiers who had timidly taken refuge in a house wanted to slander the courageous fighters in the front ranks. And do the Free Church members not misjudge the clearly expressed will of the Lord? Never in a free church, if it does not strive to become the people's church, such as the mission churches, can the Word of God be given its leavening nature to penetrate the world, never will the free church, according to the command of Christ, become the

great and wide net that catches good and evil fish from the sea. But now add to this the specifically Missourian constitution: Church government, like the power of the Keys, is vested in the **individual** congregation; we shall know well how to guard against this unbiblical and un-Lutheran radicalism; we prefer to leave the former [**Church government**] where it lies, in the hands of the sovereign; and as to the office of the Keys, Missouri will probably owe the proof that the same is somewhere in Scripture vested in the **individual** congregation, and not rather everywhere in the whole, the εκκλησία, the church, as it appears in the organic organization of the different estates. The appeal to the spiritual priesthood of the laity does not apply here; this becomes a spiritual priestly rule [*Priesterherrschaft*] of the laity, and the whole constitution is based, apart from everything else, on the confusion of the real church with the ideal church (the *communio sanctorum* [**“communion of saints”**]), i.e., strictly speaking, the endeavor to make the invisible church, which is precisely the church of the saints, to be visible. As long as God's Word and confession are powerful and strong in such Missouri organized congregations, it may be bearable; but once this lively Christian life gives way, there is a danger that everything will easily collapse. <sup>↓</sup><sup>^</sup> What is the situation in the Missouri churches? In the earlier years there was more praise, but in recent years much lamentation. As early as 1872, in the aforementioned jubilant sermon, Walther exclaimed:

“Alas, we cannot hide it from ourselves; it is as if our sun were already setting, as if we were already at the beginning of the end,”

and it sounds even sadder in his Synod address of 1878:

“Our synod is no longer what it once was. Particularly in our older congregations, in some of which the Word of God has been in use for more than a quarter of a century, some of the formerly zealous members are showing such (1) a weariness and such an (2) abuse



of Christian liberty, such (3) business after the manner of the world, such a (4) desire for wealth, such quickness to decide whether something is sinful, such a (5) lack of truly Christian child rearing, such a (6) disregard for righteous servants of Christ and such (7) ingratitude towards them, such a (8) lack of brotherly love and of the fraternal punishment that necessarily follows from it, and finally such an (9) ever-increasing frequency of great annoyances that the faithful servants among us mostly conduct their ministry with sighs, and all the righteous children of God among us lie weeping and wailing before God, and the whole church of the saints and elect hidden among us must look to the future with fear and trembling.” —

This much we can undoubtedly see from this description: It is the same over there as over here, but therein lies an essential difference: What we can tolerate in the solid structure of a church system that has been organized for a long time (albeit quite poorly organized), the Missourian Free Church, which is left to the complete discretion of the congregations, cannot tolerate; in the end it faces even more difficult battles than we do and has little prospect of a final victory. It is not unjustly said that the Synod stands only on two eyes, those of Walther: if these are closed, the doctrine and constitution could easily become unstable, which could end in a complete fragmentation of the individual elements.

^ The question we asked ourselves will be settled. The question remains whether there is any danger to us from Missouri; it answers itself after the foregoing. Although the Synod regards Germany as a mission field, it has not yet gained much ground. At present there are eleven pastors with ten congregations and about 1800 souls in the fatherland who are in contact with Missouri; \*) they carve out a miserable

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\*) These ten Missourian congregations in Germany are: **one** in Nassau, Steeden (Pastors Brunn and Eickmeyer); **two** in Hesse,

existence, especially the Brunn Preparatory School in Steeden, which sent pupils to St. Louis and Fort Wayne every year, has been dying out since its support from Missouri was withdrawn in 1878. Though here and there one may be won to the Missourian cause, neither their numbers nor the danger they bring to the home church will be great; where they appear they alienate rather than attract. It is our duty, however, to judge them mildly, and not to overlook the fact that their love for Missouri springs from their love for the Lutheran Church and its confession, the purest expression of which they believe they recognize in the Missouri Synod. We ourselves will also be inclined to appreciate impartially not only the outward blessing that God has given to a Lutheran church fellowship, but also the reverence with which it has up to this hour preserved the sanctuaries of Old Lutheran doctrine.

We are in the jubilee year of the Formula of Concord [1580→1880]. Three hundred years have passed since the symbolic fixation of our faith reached its conclusion. Over there, June 25 [1880] was celebrated in a worthy, if somewhat American [!], manner. What have we done? In most places, nothing. Celebrating is not the point, but let us at least revive the memory of our true fathers of faith. Despite all the struggles of the day, let us preserve the heritage we have inherited from them and increase it in the spirit of their faith and faithfulness. After all, the old saying remains, and we want to stick to it: "God's Word and Luther's Doctrine will never pass away."

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Wiesbaden (P. Hein) and Allendorf a. d. Lumda (P. Stallmann); **five** in Saxony, Dresden (P. Hübener), Chemnitz (P. Kern), Krimitzschau (P. Meyer) Frankenberg (P. Schneider) and Nieder-Planitz near Zwickau (P. Willkomm); one in Bavaria, Memmingen (P. Hörger) and one in Baden Sperlhos near Wilferdingen (P. Krauß)